

DATUK G. PALANIVEL has been a busy man these past weeks, campaigning north and south of the country, in a bid to wrest the MIC deputy presidency from Datuk S. Subramaniam tomorrow.

"You think it is as easy as that-ah?" he retorts when asked about the government and party machinery available to him to use to his advantage.

"I have been in a government position only the last 10 years, but the incumbent was in the government for more than 20 years.

"He should have used the government to serve the people and show that record now," said Palanivel, 57, the Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister.

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His own man

PALANIVEL IS AVERSE TO SUGGESTIONS THAT HE WILL WIN SIMPLY BECAUSE OF SAMY VELLU'S OPEN SUPPORT

Palanivel reminded Subramaniam that the latter had not been caught off guard.

"My name was announced more than 10 months ago. I think he (Subra) was hoping for another no-contest term. He thinks the post of deputy president should not be challenged.

"The MIC needs leaders who can deliver. Although we are trying to become self-reliant, the community, due to its socio-economic background, will have to continue to depend on the government for many services and facilities.

"Datuk Subra has been dropped from the government a few times. There must be reasons for this. Once, after being elected as the Damansara MP in 1974, he was defeated in the next general election by Dr V. David," Palanivel said, adding that owing to this, the MIC had lost a parliamentary representation, and Subramaniam, his deputy minister's post.

"Indians have very few seats in Parliament and, therefore, must work hard to ensure we don't lose what we have. Such is the responsibility of leaders."

A former press secretary to party president and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Palanivel insists he is his own man and not a conduit in Samy Vellu's greater plan to "finish off" Subramaniam once and for all.

He does not hide his aversion to suggestions that he will win simply because of the open support of the party president.

He reminds all - Subramaniam included - that when vice-president Datuk S.S. Subramaniam challenged Subra for the Number Two post over a decade ago, Samy Vellu had backed his deputy.

"Datuk S.S. Subramaniam was chased out of campaign meetings in the presence of Datuk Subra. An MIC vice-president was chased out of the hall!

"There were no complaints then. Why? So when it suits your convenience it's OK, is that it?" he asks.

With due respect for Subra's 24 years as deputy president, Palanivel tells delegates that the party needs a "performing" deputy.

"The community cannot afford to waste time and energy waiting forever for proof of leaders who will be an asset to them.

"There are many promising leaders in the MIC now and they should all be given their chance. We need to move on and let people with fresh ideas and new energy lead the party and the Indians."

Samy Vellu's support aside, Palanivel is confident that delegates when casting their ballots, will have it at the back of their minds that he has gone beyond the call of duty to serve.

"They know I have walked the extra mile time and again."

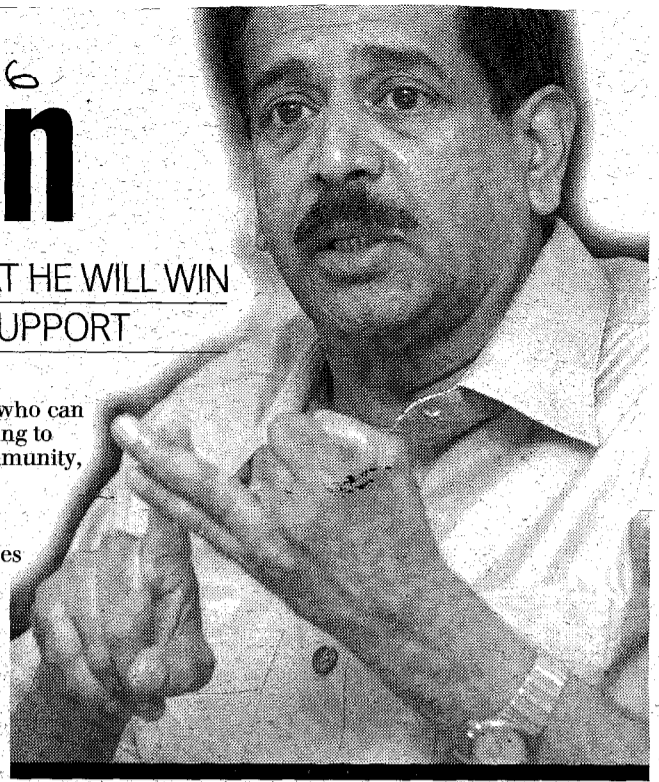
Palanivel, like Subramaniam, maintains a clean campaign and unlike Samy Vellu, does not resort to personal attacks.

However, he says that although Subramaniam has been "quiet", his machinery and newspapers aligned to him are not.

"They are his attack vehicles. He is the 'good man' who doesn't resort to 'dirty tactics' as these vehicles allege. Unfortunately, many are not aware of this," Palanivel said.

He also explained what he meant when he said in an interview with *Off The Edge* this month, that a person who has been in a position for too long becomes less sensitive to the needs of the people - a statement Subramaniam took offence to.

"I have made a clear reference to a



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performing leader and a non-performing leader and how people are intelligent enough to know the difference and make their choices. That is democracy.

"You will see how Samy Vellu has been keeping himself relevant and how he has been constantly reinventing himself and the party"

Palanivel said that in a party like the MIC, everyone who holds a position has to be a contributing leader.

"As a small community, the MIC and Indians at large, must have strong leaders who have the heart of the community at all times.

"Otherwise, we can suffer great losses in the future. Can we afford that?"

"I believe that I am relevant to the times. I have the experience, the track record and the passion to serve," he said.

While it has been said that several states back him, and others such as Selangor and Negri Sembilan are split down the middle, Palanivel is not speculating.

"In the MIC, voting is not by states for us to gauge support. I have always regarded the entire MIC as my field and I have not been parochial or clique-orientated in my approach.

"I think members, particularly delegates, are open-minded enough to know what is good for the party"

Unlike Subramaniam, a loss in the elections will not be "the be all and end all" to Palanivel's political career.

The buzz is that a consolation prize of party secretary-general is almost certain for him.

This confidence in his political continuity is probably reflected in his response when asked about his expectations of the elections: "Fear is not one of my traits. I do not fear any sort of outcome.

"The delegates have seen me over the years and have come to know me through my work, through the numerous programmes I have conscientiously implemented. I am sure they will make the right decision."

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